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## **CGA Education Committee**

**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**Wednesday, February 25, 2015**

**S.B. No. 942 ACC Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor  
Concerning Education**

**Comments on Education Funding submitted by Martha Banks, School Finance  
Specialist, League of Women Voters of Connecticut**

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**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT IS A NON-PARTISAN STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION COMPRISED OF 1600 MEMBERS IN 27 LOCAL CHAPTERS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICY AND THE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THEIR GOVERNMENT.**

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates this opportunity to comment today on the Governor's recommended appropriations for education. We are pleased that in this period of financial pressure the budget, at a minimum, essentially level funds total spending for education and increases funding in such important areas as Magnet Schools, the Open Choice Program and the Regional Vocational -Technical School System. We do have, however, some funding concerns in two major categories that constitute well over 70% of the budget.

### **Educational Cost Sharing**

The proposed budget funds ECS across all school districts for FY 2016 and FY 2017 at FY 2015 levels. The League believes this funding is inadequate. The League's position is that the state should work toward the goal of providing each community with funding that is equal to 50% of what it costs to provide a suitable education for each child within a district. The proposed budget does not approximate this level of funding.

The League also believes that the relative wealth of communities should be considered in ECS grants. The proposed budget abandons the state's recent efforts in to provide increased ECS funding to poorer communities to help close the achievement gap. With this budget, all communities, not just the wealthier ones, are being level funded. Education costs are increasing but funding from the state, as a percentage of local budgets, is decreasing.

There are several proposed bills before the Education Committee that seek to increase, to varying degrees, the Educational Cost Sharing grant. The League urges your committee to

examine each of these proposals carefully. Increased funding of ECS would lessen the tax burden on local communities striving to provide quality education to their children.

#### **Excess Cost**

The proposed pool of money for special education excess cost funding is again level funded in FY 2016 and FY 2017 despite the fact that the state has flat funded this grant for the last six years. The governor's decision to flat fund excess cost is disappointing as the cost of providing these federal and state mandated services, as a percentage of the education budget, has been steadily increasing in most communities across the state. Furthermore, communities have difficulty accurately budgeting for special education. They cannot forecast the severity of the needs of any special ed students who may move into the district after their budget has been set.

The provision of unexpected special education services may push a local budget into the deficit column. To "plug" these deficits, Boards of Education are often thrust into the untenable position of having to reduce expenditures for non-special ed students. The net result is that the cost of providing mandated services squeezes the discretionary budget for non-special education students. This budgetary tension is unfair and should not exist. More adequate funding of the special education excess cost grant would help to reduce this budgetary tension and promote the delivery of suitable education experience for all students within a district.

The Education Committee has several proposed special education funding bills before it. While each contains different language, the goal of all of them is to reduce special education costs born by local communities and to transfer those costs, to varying degrees, to the state. The League encourages the Education Committee to give serious consideration to these bills.

Budgets are a balancing exercise between absolute needs, the nice to haves and revenue resources. Both the State and the League identify education as a top priority --funding for education should reflect this importance.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.